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ABSTRACT

To determine how college students would rate themselves on a 5-point continuum from homosexual to heterosexual and then to see how those classified individuals perceived themselves and their parents, 1,783 single college students (741 males, 1,032 females), between the ages of 18 and 23, completed two self-report questionnaires. The first assessed sexual orientation on a 5-point self-rating scale containing bipolar adjectives. The Family-Stress Index measured perceptions of family, parents, and self in a yes/no format. In addition, students were asked about suicidal thoughts, alcohol and drug abuse, learning disabilities, and childhood friends. The results showed that homo- and bisexuals both tended to view themselves more negatively and to remember more family stress than did heterosexuals. However, actual data analysis indicated that differences only existed between homo- and heterosexuals with respect to remembered family stress, and between bi- and heterosexuals with respect to self ratings. Bisexuals reported the lowest self concepts. Drinking problems and suicidal thoughts were highest in homosexual males, while homosexual females reported the highest incidence of learning disabilities. Future research should focus in more detail on parental variables, suicidal tendencies, and substance abuse. (Data analysis and both questionnaires are appended.) (BL)

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PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND PARENTS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires were given to 1770 undergraduates. From anonymous self reports participants were placed in one of three groups (homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual) and compared on measures of family stress (as remembered from childhood and adolescence) and current self concepts. Homo-and bisexuals both tended to view themselves more negatively and to remember more family stress than did heterosexuals. LSD tests, however, indicated that significant differences existed only between homo-and heterosexuals with respect to remember family stress, and only between bi-and heterosexuals with respect to self ratings. It is suggested that the lower self ratings found among the bisexuals may be related to confused sexual identity and that homosexuality may be in some cases related to the desire to avoid the stresses perceived to be associated with marriage and family life.

Evidence from numerous sources suggests that homosexuality is gaining greater public acceptance and legal protection. Such changes may affect the way young people of different sexual orientations view themselves and their parents. Investigating these variables over the next several decades would be of interest. Because previous homosexual research has focused on either clinical patients or volunteers from homophile groups, research on more representative samples is desirable. The purpose of this study was to determine how college students would rate themselves along a five point continuum from homosexual to heterosexual and how those classified as homo-, bi-, and heterosexuals might differ in their perception of parents and self.

METHODOLOGY

Self-report questionnaires were given to students enrolled in introductory psychology classes during class time. To assure anonymity and encourage candor, participants were asked not to put their names on the questionnaires nor the Scantron blanks. All students in attendance agreed to participate. Of the 1783 participants, 741 were males and 1032 were females. Over 90% were between 18 and 23 years old and over 94% were single.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained a Self-Rating Scale (See Appendix A) which consisted of 31 pairs of bipolar adjectives separated by a five-point rating scale, a Family-Stress Index (See Appendix B)

adapted from Monge (1973),

which contained 19 questions on perceptions of parents as remembered from childhood, and five additional questions related to suicidal thoughts, alcohol and drug abuse problems, learning disabilities, and having a close friend of the same sex during childhood.

Definitions

A "homosexual" was defined as a participant who rated themself more homosexual than heterosexual (that is, a "1" or a "2" along the homosexual-heterosexual continuum). "Bisexuals" were those who rated themselves as a "3" or a "4" along the same continuum; and "heterosexuals" were those who rated themselves as a "5."

Statistics

Factor analysis of the Self-Rating scale produced four factors which accounted for 91.8% of the variance (See Appendix C). We called these factors (1) self-satisfaction, (2) self-confidence, (3) smartness/valuableness, and (4) kindness/goodness. Using factor loadings and individual self-ratings, factor scores were computed for each student. The Family-Stress score was the number of stressors checked on the Family-Stress Index.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the number and percentages of males and females who were classified as homo-, bi-, and heterosexual. The percentages of males and females who rated themselves as predominately

homosexual are virtually the same. Males, however, were significantly more likely to have been classified as bisexual than were females.

Table 2 shows mean factor scores for male and female homo-, bi-, and heterosexuals for each of the four self-concept factors. Analyses of variance revealed statistically significant differences among the 3 groups on all four factors, with heterosexuals having the highest and the bisexuals having the lowest self concepts on all four factors; however, LSD tests revealed significant differences only between hetero- and bisexuals.

Table 3 shows that analysis of variance also revealed significant differences among the three groups in perceived family stress during childhood. In this case the homosexuals perceived the most and the heterosexuals perceived the least family stress. An LSD-test revealed a significant difference between homo- and heterosexuals on this measure. Table 4 shows Chi square comparisons on 7 of the Family-Stress items.

Table 5 reveals significant differences among male groups in reported drinking problems, suicidal thoughts, and learning disabilities. Also interesting was the finding that homosexual males were almost three times as likely as heterosexual males to say they had no close friend of the same sex as a child. Although female homosexuals also reported more suicidal thoughts and drinking problems than bi- or heterosexuals, the only significant difference

among female groups was in learning disabilities. Female homosexuals and male bisexuals most often checked this item.

DISCUSSION

The percentage of non-heterosexuals in our sample is less than that often reported. This could be due to differences in methods of obtaining and classifying data and/or to the young age of our sample. It is consistent, however, with Haynes and Oziel's (1976) report that the incidence of homosexuality has not increased in the three decades since Kinsey's work, despite greater social and legal tolerance of it.

Although our homosexuals tended to have lower self-concepts than heterosexuals, bisexuals reported the lowest self-concepts. This could relate to their having more confusion and/or conflict about their sexual orientation than those who identify themselves more readily as homo- or heterosexual.

Homosexuals reported more family stress in childhood and adolescence than did heterosexuals. Although such parental problems could conceivably be a reaction to perceived differences in the developing child, this finding more likely reflects some retrospective distortion by the respondants related to their sexual orientation and/or greater introspection about and willingness to report such stress. It could, however, also reflect some causal effect on their sexual preference. Undoubtedly, a multitude of factors

contribute to one's sexual orientation, but the need served by choosing a life style other than heterosexual may not be exclusively sexual. For example, the finding that homosexuals tended to have less self-confidence and perceived more family stress than heterosexuals suggests that homosexuals' life style may be related to their desire to avoid problems they perceived in their own families and to their lack of confidence to do better than their parents in avoiding such problems.

Although more overall family stress was perceived by homo- than heterosexuals, individual items dealing with poor relationships with father vs. mother for males and females do not appear to be consistent with Freud's theory of homosexual development. Although a number of studies have supported this theory, Kenyon (1968) and Siegelman (1974) found both male and female homosexuals reporting poorer relationships with toth parents, consistent with our sample's tendency.

Drinking problems and suicidal thoughts were greater for homo- than for bi- than for heterosexuals, although differing significantly only for the males. The higher incidence of suicidal thoughts among male homosexuals may be due to greater pressures on and discrimination against them than exists on and against female homosexuals in our macho society. The higher incidence of reported drinking problems among homosexuals is probably a reflection of their lifestyles which often includes "gay" bars.

We are currently following up this study with more detailed questions on perceived parental variables, suicidal tendencies, and substance abuse.

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TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF MALES

AND FEMALES CLASSIFIED AS HOMOSEXUAL,

BI-SEXUAL AND HETEROSEXUAL

	Homosexual		Bi-Sexual		Heterosexual *	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Males N=734	18	2.5%	79	10.8%	637	86.8%
Females N=1018	27	2.7%	74	7.3%	917	90.1%

*p<.05, chi square

Homosexual 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 Heterosexual

Homo. Bi-sexual Hetero.

TABLE 2

MEAN FACTOR SCORES BY GROUPS*

FACTOR 1: SELF SATISFACTION

	Homosexuals	Bi-Sexuals	Heterosexuals	Average
Males	19.32	18.87	20.08	19.93
Females	19.40	19.34	19.98	19.92
Average	19.42	19.10	20.02	19.93

FACTOR 2: SELF CONFIDENCE

	Homosexuals	Bi-Sexuals	Heterosexuals	Average
Males	16.27	16.08	17.04	16.92
Females	16.31	15.42	16.42	16.34
Average	16.30	15.76	16.67	16.58

FACTOR 3: SMARTNESS/VALUABLENESS

	Homosexuals	Bi-Sexuals	Heterosexuals	Average
Males	10.87	10.55	10.85	10.82
Females	10.65	10.30	10.87	10.82
Average	10.74	10.43	10.86	10.82

Cont.

Table 2 (cont.)

FACTOR 4: KINDNESS/GOODNESS

	Homosexuals	Bi-Sexuals	Heterosexuals	Average
Males	9.46	9.44	9.64	9.61
Females	9.50	9.47	9.99	9.94
Average	9.48	9.46	9.84	9.80

*Differences in mean factor scores among homosexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals were significant for Factors 1, 2, 3 & 4 ($p < .001$). Differences between males and females were significant for Factors 2 and 4 ($p < .001$). None of the interactions were significant. LSD tests revealed that significant differences existed only between heterosexuals and bisexuals on all four factors.

TABLE 3

MEAN FAMILY STRESS SCORES BY GROUPS*

	Homosexuals	Bi-Sexuals	Heterosexuals	Average
Males	4.33	2.82	2.83	2.86
Females	3.30	3.39	2.58	2.65
Average	3.71	3.10	2.68	2.74

*Difference among homosexuals, bi-sexuals and heterosexuals were significant at the .01 level (Anova). Differences between males and females and the interaction among groups were not significant. LSD tests revealed that significant differences existed between heterosexuals and homosexuals. ($P < .05$)

TABLE 4

PROPORTION OF MALE AND FEMALE HOMOSEXUALS, BI-SEXUALS AND HOMOSEXUALS REPORTING THE FOLLOWING FAMILY STRESS VARIABLES

	Males			Females		
	Homo	Bi	Hetero	Homo	Bi	Hetero
Maternal Drinking Problems	22.2%	3.8%	8.2%*	18.5%	6.8%	7.6%
Maternal Emotional Problems	11.1%	7.6%	14.2%	22.2%	17.6%	10.7%*
Poor Relationship with mother	22.2%	6.3%	8.6%	22.2%	14.9%	11.0%
Paternal Emotional Problems	11.1%	6.3%	8.5%	25.9%	24.3%	15.0%*
Poor Relationship with father	27.8%	17.7%	15.5%	25.9%	26.0%	15.1%*
Parental Depression	27.8%	22.8%	19.8%	7.4%	35.1%	18.6%**
Physical Abuse by a parent	5.6%	3.8%	5.5%	0%	13.5%	6.6%*

*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$; chi square

TABLE 5

PROPORTION OF MALE AND FEMALE HOMOSEXUALS, BISEXUALS AND HETEROSEXUALS INDICATION THE FOLLOWING

	Males			Females		
	Homo	Bi	Hetero	Homo	Bi	Hetero
Do you or have you ever had a drinking problem?	22.2%	15.2%	9.5%*	11.1%	4.1%	3.4%
Do you or have you ever had a drug abuse problem?	16.7%	17.7%	10.1%	3.7%	5.4%	3.9%
Have you seriously considered a suicide attempt in the last six months?	22.2%	7.6%	5.0%*	11.1%	6.9%	6.0%
Have you ever been diagnosed by a professional as having a reading or learning disability?	0%	15.2%	6.1%*	14.8%	4.1%	4.3%*
No close friend of the same sex as a child	11.1%	8.9%	3.8%*	7.4%	8.3%	5.7%

*$p < .05$, chi square

APPENDIX A

SELF RATING SCALE

Listed below are a number of adjectives which people sometimes use to describe themselves or other people. We would very much appreciate it if you would indicate which of the two adjectives on each line you think describes you best. For example, if one of the pairs were:

ANGRY a ____ : b ____ : c ____ : d ____ : ____ : CALM

and you think of yourself as being very angry, you would record "a" on your answer sheet.

**If you think of yourself as being angry, but not quiet as angry as other people, then you would record "b" on your answer sheet.

**If you do not think of yourself as being either angry or calm, record "c".

**If you think of yourself as being calm, but not quite as calm as others, record "d".

**If you think of yourself as being very calm, record "e".

	a	b	c	d	e	
CONFIDENT	____	____	____	____	____	UNSURE
BAD	____	____	____	____	____	GOOD
STRONG	____	____	____	____	____	WEAK
SECURE	____	____	____	____	____	INSECURE
HATED	____	____	____	____	____	LOVED
FOLLOWER	____	____	____	____	____	LEADER
SHAKY	____	____	____	____	____	STEADY
WORTHLESS	____	____	____	____	____	VALUABLE
POPULAR	____	____	____	____	____	UNPOPULAR
SUCCESSFUL	____	____	____	____	____	FAILURE
TIRED	____	____	____	____	____	REFRESHED
INFERIOR	____	____	____	____	____	SUPERIOR
NICE	____	____	____	____	____	AWFUL
BORED	____	____	____	____	____	INTERESTED
SHARP	____	____	____	____	____	DULL
APPRECIATED	____	____	____	____	____	UNAPPRECIATED

	a	b	c	d	e	
HAPPY	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	SAD
CREATIVE	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	UNCREATIVE
RECOGNIZED	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	UNRECOGNIZED
KIND	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	CRUEL
TROUBLED	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	SERENE
PRODUCTIVE	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	UNPRODUCTIVE
NERVOUS	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	RELAXED
INDEPENDENT	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	DEPENDENT
STABLE	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	UNSTABLE
FRIENDLY	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	UNFRIENDLY
HOPELESS	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	HOPEFUL
SMART	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	DUMB
DISSATISFIED	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	SATISFIED
HEALTHY	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	UNHEALTHY
HOMOSEXUAL	____:	____:	____:	____:	____:	HETEROSEXUAL

APPENDIX B

FAMILY STRESS INDEX*

The following questions pertain to your experiences as a child and adolescent. Do not spend a lot of time thinking about these, your subjective opinion is what we want. (a) Yes (b) No

a.____ b. ____ Was your mother overly permissive?

a.____ b. ____ Was your mother overly strict and authoritarian?

a.____ b. ____ Has your mother ever had severe emotional problems?

a.____ b. ____ Did your mother ever have a drinking or drug abuse problem (this includes presceiption drugs)?

a.____ b. ____ Was your relationship with your mother usually good?

a.____ b. ____ Was your father (stepfather, etc.) overly permissive?

a.____ b. ____ Has your father ever had severe emotional problems?

a.____ b. ____ Did your father ever have a drinking or drug abuse problem?

a.____ b. ____ Was your relationship with your father usually good?

a.____ b. ____ Did it seem like one of your parents was angry much of the time?

a.____ b. ____ Did it seem like one of your parents was depressed much of the time?

a.____ b. ____ Did either of your parents ever attempt suicide?

a.____ b. ____ Were you ever physically abused by one of your parents?

a.____ b. ____ Were there many conflicts between you and your parents?

a.____ b. ____ Did one or both of your parents usually take the time to listen to you when you went to them with problems?

a.____ b. ____ Were there many conflicts and arguments between your parents?

a.____ b. ____ As a youngster (before 18) did you lose a parent to death or circumstances other than divorce?

a.____ b. ____ As a youngster did your parents get a divorce?

*An analysis of variance comparing between people and within people variance yielded a reliability coefficient of .74604.

APPENDIX C

FACTOR ANALYSIS

A factor analysis of the Self Rating Scale produced the following four factors which together accounted for 91.8 percent of the variance. The factors and the bi-polar adjectives which are most heavily weighted on them are presented below. All factor weights were obtained from a varimax rotated factor matrix.

FACTOR I: SELF SATISFACTION (Accounted for 66.2% of the variance) *

Adjective Pairs	Factor Coefficients	Factor Loadings
Serene - Troubled	.29233	.65059
Satisfied - Dissatisfied	.20372	.57694
Happy - Sad	.20977	.56512
Refreshed - Tired	.17943	.52872
Relaxed - Nervous	.14685	.48410
Stable - Unstable	.10518	.44449
Secure - Insecure	.06017	.40305
Appreciated - Unnappreciated	.06947	.40244
Healthy - Unhealthy	.08384	.35300
Interested - Bored	.08035	.38215
Steady - Shaky	.02293	.31317
Hopeful - Hopeless	.03751	.31126

FACTOR II: SELF CONFIDENCE (Accounted for 12.0% of the variance). *

Confident - Unsure	.25377	.56813
Leader - Follower	.20907	.51198
Steady - Shaky	.21400	.50289
Strong - Weak	.18236	.49840
Secure - Insecure	.17848	.47684
Stable - Unstable	.14757	.42684
Independent - Dependent	.13576	.39401
Superior - Inferior	.09308	.32364
Successful - Failure	.00595	.30315

FACTOR III: SMARTNESS/VALUABLENESS (Accounted for 8.6% of the variance) *

Adjective Pairs	Factor Coefficients	Factor Loadings
Smart - Dumb	.36881	.61515
Sharp - Dull	.21797	.49338
Successful - Failure	.23498	.49055
Productive - Unproductive	.19723	.43661
Valuable - Worthless	.09224	.33008
Creative - Uncreative	.10343	.31570

FACTOR IV: KINDNESS/GOODNESS (Accounted for 5.0% of the variance) *

Kind - Cruel	.39219	.70646
Nice - Awful	.39351	.69997
Friendly - Unfriendly	.23977	.56846
Good - Bad	.04156	.26364

* Analyses of variance comparing variation between people and within people yielded the following reliability coefficients for the respective factor scales:

1. Factor I, Alpha = .74109;
2. Factor II, Alpha = .80957;
3. Factor III, Alpha = .67431;
4. Factor IV, Alpha = .68548.